Journal of Happiness Studies (2006) 7:499–515
DOI 10.1007/s10902-006-9010-9

GEORG P. MUELLER

CONFLICT BUFFERS AND MARITAL SATISFACTION: ON THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

(Received 15 June 2005; Accepted 17 April 2006)

ABSTRACT. This paper deals with the deterioration in the subjective quality of life of women as a result of marital conflict. Whereas primary and secondary prevention are generally targeted at maintaining or increasing the current level of marital happiness this paper focuses on the possibilities for buffering the negative impact of conflict on women's quality of life. In particular, this paper is interested in the conflict buffering effects of various forms of *social support* such as home visiting by professional social workers or informal contacts with peers. In order to assess and compare the effectiveness of these forms of tertiary prevention, data from interviews with young mothers in the city of Zurich (Switzerland) will be reanalyzed. The data confirm the phenomenon of stress buffering from social support and reveal variation with regard to the *effectiveness* of different stress buffers. Female peer support e.g. seems to be at least as successful as home visiting by professional nurses and social workers.

KEY WORDS: conflict buffers, conflicts, marital satisfaction, quality of life, social support, stress

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of empirical family studies show that physical violence between spouses is a major problem all over the world (Gelles and Cornell, 1983; Gelles, 1997; Gillioz et al., 1997; Straus and Gelles, 1999). Even where, marital conflicts do not escalate very far, they are often perceived as a threat to marital quality of life. Conflicts may damage the material status and/or the prestige of one or both parties. Furthermore, they do not fit the idealistic image of internal harmony within families. Conflict resolution, whether by family mediation, negotiation, or arbitration, is one strategy, to combat poor quality of life in families (Ellis and Stuckless, 1996). Another approach with positive effects is *primary prevention*, e.g. by clarifying

family roles, defining appropriate behavioral norms, or mobilizing additional resources (Bloom, 1996).

Although recognizing the virtues of these family intervention methods, this paper follows a different approach based on *social support* to *buffer* the negative impact of conflicts (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Barrera, 1988). Social support can be offered by different categories of persons: friends social workers or peers and can mobilize various resources such as money, advice, or unpaid voluntary work. This paper attempts to demonstrate the positive effects of social support by systematic *empirical* analysis. In addition, this analysis also reveals differences between various forms of social support with regard to their e*ffectiveness* in buffering conflicts.

The interview data, used to analyze the impact of conflict buffers, were originally collected for the evaluation of a home visiting project for young families in the City of Zurich (Switzerland) (for details see section 3 of this paper and Godenzi and Mueller, 2001). However, the data are also useful for testing the effects of various other conflict buffers, since they allow both an assessment of the impact of home visits as a form of professional support by nurses or social workers as well as of other types of more informal social support.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conflicts are *stressors* in terms of the classical definition of Lazarus and Folkman (1992: 22 ff.), since they frequently entail two *negative appraisals* of the situation. On the one hand, they are often perceived as having negative *consequences* for the future *status* of the person who loses the conflict. On the other hand, conflicts create stress, if individual power resources are not sufficient to exclude the possibility of a defeat. Stress in turn impairs the *quality of life (QoL)* of the persons concerned, who generally suffer from the threat of *loss of status* and the *impossibility of excluding* this negative event. Consequently, our *hypothesis 1* postulates that the higher the level or frequency of a conflict C, the higher the stress S on the one hand and the lower the quality of life QoL on the other. Figure 1 shows a

schematic picture of these relations. For simplicity they are presented in linear form, although in reality they are often *monotonic*.

Hypothesis 1 implies that the reduction of conflict entails an increase in quality of life. This mechanism is used by many programs for conflict resolution, such as e.g. negotiation or family mediation. However, in zero-sum situations with limited resources, conflicts may be hard to solve. For this reason, the present paper focuses on an alternative approach, which does *not* claim to be able to change the level or frequency of a conflict. It is called *conflict buffering*[1] and attempts to reduce the angle α of the relationship between the conflict C and the quality of life QoL (see Figure 1) by means of intervening variables, which moderate the negative effects of conflicts. For *linear* relationships between conflicts and QoL, the impact of conflict buffers is presented in Figure 2. It can be summarized by the following three hypotheses:

a) Conflict buffers increase the quality of life *QoL* (hypothesis 2). Therefore, in *high* buffering situations the line in Figure 2 expressing the relationship between conflict C and QoL is always *above* the corresponding line for the *no* buffering case.
b) The higher the intensity or frequency of a *conflict C*, the more important the *gains from conflict buffers* with regard to additional QoL (hypothesis 3). For this reason ΔQoL_2 is

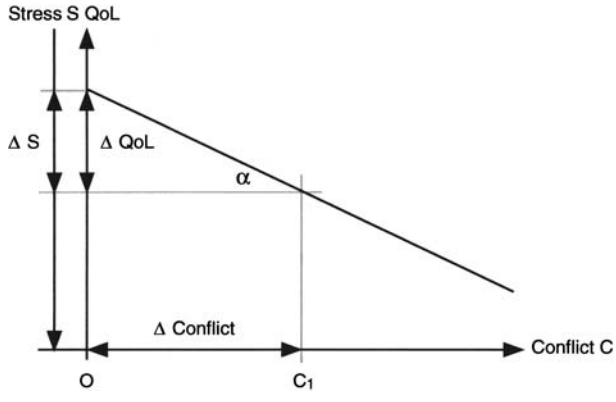

Figure 1. Conflict reduction as a strategy for increasing the QoL.

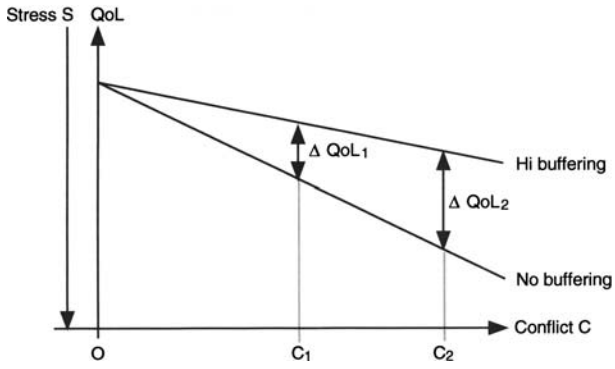

Figure 2. Conflict buffering as a strategy for increasing the QoL.

in Figure 2 greater than ΔQoL_1. For conflict level $C = 0$ the effects of buffers are assumed to be *zero* since the *total absence* of conflicts excludes the possibility of any negative impact which can be reduced by stress buffers.

c) For a given level of conflict C_i, the more *effective* a conflict buffer is, the greater the difference ΔQoL_i between the high and the no buffering situation (hypothesis 4).

These three hypotheses also hold for *non-linear monotonic* relations between conflict and QoL, if for a given level of conflict C the *slope* of the curve representing the high-buffering situation is always *smaller* than the corresponding slope of the curve for the no-buffering case.

Conflict buffers are obviously important for gaining quality of life without being compelled to reduce the level of conflict. In what follows we attempt to identify strategies, that can be used for this purpose. The definition of stress by Lazarus and Fokman (1992: 22 ff.) suggests directing the focus of attention to the potential *loss of status* and the *subjective risk* of being defeated in a conflict. Any strategy that reduces this risk or the resulting loss of status can function as a conflict buffer. Decreasing the *subjective relevance* of a conflict obviously helps to reduce the subjective loss of status. Similarly any increase in *self-confidence* will reduce the subjective risk of being defeated. The literature also discusses the role of *social support* as a stress or conflict buffer (Barrera, 1988; Gottlieb, 1988; Thompson, 1995). On the one

hand it may increase the *resources for winning* a conflict and so reduce the risk of being defeated. On the other hand social support may also have the function of an *insurance* that distributes the maximum loss among several partners and thus alleviates the burden of the worst case scenario. This bivalence probably makes social support an efficient conflict buffer which is relatively often sought by persons in conflict situations. Thus the main focus of the following sections of this paper will be on *social support as a conflict buffer*.

THE MEASUREMENT OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

According to our previous theoretical considerations, in order to analyze the role of social support in buffering family conflicts and advancing the quality of family life, we need three different kinds of data:

a) Information about family *conflicts* which impair the quality of life of families.
b) Data about the *quality of life* of families or individual family members.
c) Information about forms of *social support* by which family conflicts can be buffered.

For financial reasons data could not be collected in a primary survey. Consequently, we present in this paper a secondary analysis of existing standardized interviews collected in 1999/2000 by Godenzi and Mueller for the evaluation of a *home visiting program* in the city of Zurich, Switzerland (Godenzi and Mueller, 2001; Mueller, 2005). Like many other programs (e.g. Healthy Families America, 1995), this intervention was targeted at the peaceful resolution of family conflicts and comprised six one-hour visits to young families during the first year after the birth of the first child. The home visitors were nurses with some social work education, who usually worked at local health centers as medical counselors for mothers with small children. The 201 families receiving this treatment were randomly drawn from the population register of families with a first child born in 1999/2000 and thus had no specific social problems.

Consequently, the content of the home visits was *non-specific* and could address any medical, psychological, or social problem which arose. All the families participated voluntarily in the experiment.

The mentioned interviews were conducted shortly after the final home visit and included both the mothers of the *treatment families* and a control group of 226 mothers with *no* special treatment, who were also randomly drawn from the same population register. Thus, the interviews with these two groups are statistically representative for the population of young mothers in the city of Zurich giving birth to their first child in 1999/2000. The questionnaire used in the study includes the following variables, which are considered to be useful for empirical analyses of conflict buffering (Godenzi and Mueller, 2001):

– *Marital satisfaction* of the interviewed mothers as an important aspect of the wife's subjective *quality of life*.[2] In the following, this indicator will be used as the *main dependent variable* with two dichotomized values: 1 for "high" and 0 for "medium" or "low" satisfaction. The split of the original variable is motivated by the interest of the paper in maintaining a *high* degree of marital satisfaction in spite of family conflicts.
– *Frequency of conflicts* between the spouses which varies from 0 = "never" to 3 = "often", with two intermediate degrees 1 = "rarely" and 2 = "sometimes"[3] This variable is used for operationalizing conflict related stress.
– *Participation in the home visiting program*, briefly outlined in the first part of his section (Mueller, 2005). This binary 0–1 variable indicates the presence (value 1) or absence (value 0) of non-specific professional support for young families with medical or social problems, which was not necessarily conflict-related.
– *Conflict-related support from wife's friends*, which is considered "high" (value 1) if it occurs "sometimes" or "often", and "low" (value 0) in all other cases.[4] This binary split facilitates the empirical analyses in section 4 and is as close as possible to the median value of the original scale. The resulting variable typically refers to an instrumental form of non-professional support.

– *General support from friends* etc.[5] This form of support is instrumental but not conflict-related and includes among others child-minding and similar non-professional personal services. The variable is dichotomized near the median value, where support occurring ''daily'' or ''1–2 times per week'' is considered to indicate ''high'' general support (value 1). All other intensities of support have been coded as ''low'' (value 0).
– *Wife's contacts with peers*. By operational definition they take place without accompanying husbands or partners.[6] Such contacts are considered as a form of weak mutual support among women, which is not instrumental and usually not conflict-related. For reasons of comparability, this support-variable is dichotomized in the same way as *general support from friends:* ''high'' values are coded as 1 and mean contacts occurring ''daily'' or ''1–2 × per week''. All other frequencies of contacts are coded as ''low'' (value 0).

Since there are four different variables for measuring social support, we will have the opportunity to study the effects of different kinds of conflict buffers. According to their operationalizations, they vary with regard to the following three dimensions:

a) *Relation to conflict:* Some buffers, such as *conflict-related support from wife's friends*, obviously have a closer relation to conflict than others.
b) *Professionalism:* The nurses in the *home visiting* program are considered to be more professional in their approach to coping with stress than the friends, peers, and neighbors involved in the other three forms of conflict buffering.
c) *Instrumentality:* Some forms of support such as *general support from friends* are probably more instrumental in meeting resource deficits of families than others.

For our analysis this typology is meaningful to the extent that we expect a *positive correlation* between the *level* of each of the three mentioned dimensions and the *effectiveness* of the corresponding conflict buffers. Thus, buffers with high instrumentality, high professionalism, or a high degree of conflict-relation should be more effective than buffers with low instrumentality, professionalism, or conflict-relation.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSES AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

If our hypothesis 1 about the negative impact of conflicts on the quality of life is correct, we should be able to observe a *negative correlation* between marital satisfaction and the frequency of marital conflict. For these two variables statistical analyses show in fact a correlation Tau-c = −0.267, which is significant at the level $p < 0.001$. As a consequence, the percentage of wives with high marital satisfaction drops from 100 to 30%, if the level of conflict is increased from 0 = "never" to 3 = "often". Even when making allowance for the *ordinal* nature of the conflict scale, this deterioration of the quality of life is not linear but seems to *accelerate*, if the level of conflict is increased (see Figures 3–6).

If *conflict buffers* are *present*, the aforementioned relation between conflict and the loss of quality of life should become more *moderate*. According to our theory (see hypothesis 3), the difference in quality of life between a buffered and a non-buffered conflict situation should *increase* if the frequency of conflict is augmented. Figures 3–6, which display these relationships between conflict and marital satisfaction for different buffers, should consequently show the same scissors-like pattern as

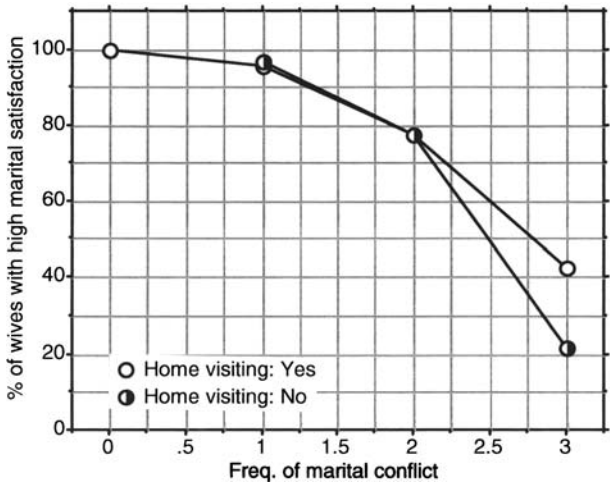

Figure 3. The buffer effect of the home visiting program.

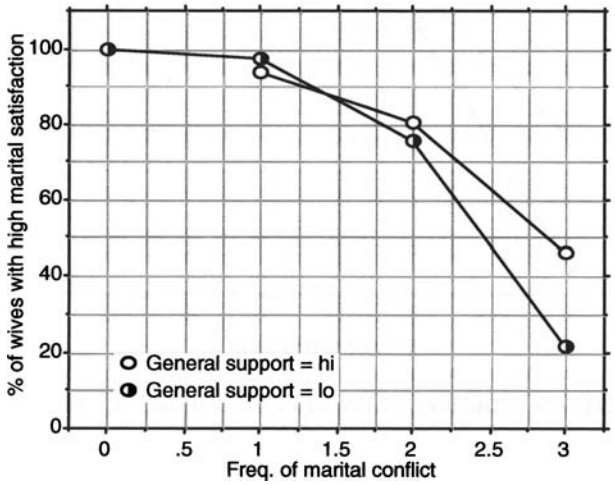

Figure 4. The buffer effect of general support from friends.

Figure 2, which summarizes these theoretical considerations for the linear case.

Figure 3 presents the data for the buffering effects of *home visiting*. To a certain extent this figure gives the expected pattern, though only for the *highest* level of marital conflict. Since families participating in the home visiting program were selected

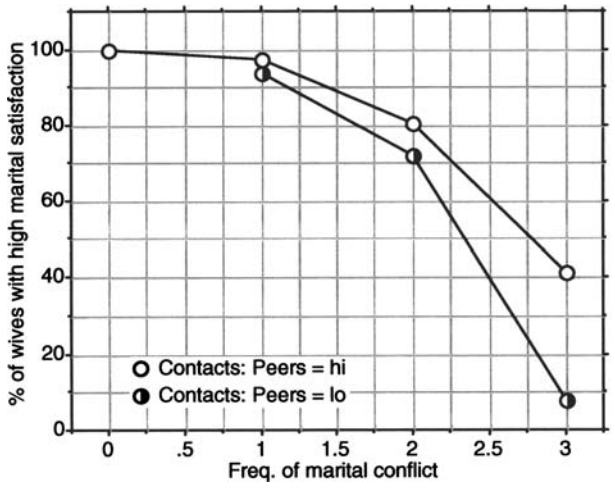

Figure 5. The buffer effect of wife's contacts with peers.

by a random procedure and thus have *similar conflicts* as non-treated families, the effects observed in Figure 3 are probably real treatment-effects of the home visiting program. As anticipated, the scissors-like divergence between the buffered and the non-buffered conflict situation is also present in Figures 4 and 5 which refer to *general support from friends* and the *wife's contacts with peers*. For the second of these buffers, the difference from the non-buffered situation is also visible for spouses, whose frequency of conflict reaches only a *medium* level with score 2. *Wife's contacts with peers* without accompanying husbands/partners are thus hypothesized to further gender solidarity among women, which seems to be more efficient than other forms of social support (Lin and Westcott, 1991).

In contrast to Figures 3–5, the line graph in Figure 6, which refers to *conflict-related support from wife's friends*, does *not* confirm the theoretical expectation that conflict-buffers always have a positive impact on the quality of family life (see hypothesis 2). It seems that *conflict-related support from wife's friends* emotionalizes the situation and thus increases the *relevance* of the conflict and of the potential losses in the case of a defeat (cf. Coyne et al., 1988). Consequently this form of conflict-related support is more a "*conflict multiplier*" than a conflict

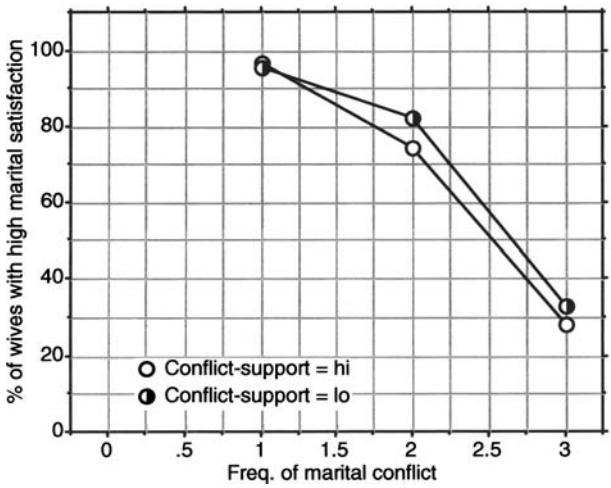

Figure 6. The buffer effect of conflict-related support from wife's friends.

buffer. The curve in Figure 6 representing the *high* buffering situation thus displays *lower values* for marital satisfaction than the curve for the low buffering situation.

Up to this point the discussion of the effects of conflict buffers has been principally qualitative, without *comparisons* between observed effects and without asking questions about *statistical significance*. For this reason we present in Table I the

TABLE I
Logistic regression coefficients: The effects of stress buffers at different levels of marital conflict

Stress buffers:	Frequency of marital conflict:			
	0.0	1.0	2.0	3.0
Conflict-related support	–	[0.028]	−0.570	[0.050]
	(–)	(0.969)	(0.370)	(0.984)
	–	$p = 0.489$	$p = 0.062$	$p = 0.480$
Gen. support from friends	–	[−0.942]	[0.348]	1.514
	(–)	(0.937)	(0.378)	(0.959)
	–	$p = 0.158$	$p = 0.179$	$p = 0.057$
Wife's contacts with peers	–	[0.908]	0.516	2.444
	(–)	(0.972)	(0.362)	(1.163)
	–	$p = 0.175$	$p = 0.077$	$p = 0.018$
Home visiting	–	[−0.262]	[−0.091]	1.502
	(–)	(0.949)	(0.352)	(0.920)
	–	$p = 0.392$	$p = 0.398$	$p = 0.052$
Constant	–	3.316	1.212	−3.815
(= effect of non-buffered conflict)	(–)	(0.988)	(0.374)	(1.480)
	–	$p = 0.001$	$p = 0.001$	$p = 0.005$
N of cases[7]	7	126	199	36
R-square (Nagelkerke)	–	0.058	0.035	0.391

Dependent variable: Marital satisfaction: Binary variable with the values 1 = "high" and 0 = "medium" or "low".
Independent variables: Conflict buffers, all conceptualized as binary 0–1-variables: see section 3.
Method of parameter estimation: Logistic regression with explanatory variables entered in one step.
Significances (1-tailed tests): See *p*-values; [ ] = not significant at level $p = 0.10$.
Other symbols: –: No estimation for technical reasons: insufficient N, etc; ( ): Standard errors of estimated coefficients.

results of four *logistic regressions* (Agresti, 1990, 84ff; Aldrich and Nelson, 1992), with which we attempt to explain the probability of high marital satisfaction for given levels of conflict. The explanatory variables of these regressions are binary 0–1 dummies which measure the presence or absence of conflict buffers. This statistical design has the advantage that the effects of the *level of conflict* on marital satisfaction is held *constant* for each of the four regressions. The remaining variation of the dependent variable, i.e. the probability of high marital satisfaction, is thus *only* due to the effects of the various *conflict buffers*. Their standardization as binary 0–1 dummies avoids statistical problems with the *ordinal* scaling of the original data and enables direct comparisons of regression coefficients: if hypothesis 3 is true, both the effect of a conflict buffer and its associated regression coefficients should increase with a growing level of conflict. Moreover, for a given level of conflict the more *effective* conflict buffers should display higher regression coefficients than the less effective ones (see hypothesis 4). Alternative statistical approaches with *only one* regression equation but many explanatory variables describing the interaction between varying levels of conflict and different stress buffers have been discarded because of the instability of the resulting parameter estimation: in this case the explanatory variables are *too numerous* and often *highly correlated*. As a result they yield unreliable regression coefficients.

With the preferred statistical design, based on separate regression for different levels of conflict, we are able to confirm *hypothesis* 1: according to Table 1 the higher the level of conflict, the lower the regression *constant* defining the level of marital satisfaction for the non-buffered cases. The differences between adjacent constants are relatively high so that statistical significance at the 2.3% and 0.05% levels is assured.[8]

According to hypothesis 2, the negative effect of conflict on marital satisfaction should be alleviated by stress buffers, which are hypothesized to be more effective for higher levels of conflict than for lower ones (hypothesis 3). Consequently, for lower levels of conflict, the effects of buffers could be hidden by statistical noise, especially if the mechanisms postulated in

hypothesis 3 are *non-linear*. This probably explains the many insignificant coefficients that can be observed in the first three columns of Table 1. Nevertheless, Table 1 does provide some evidence for hypothesis 2. With one exception, the *significant* regression coefficients of the independent variables are *positive* and consequently the associated stress buffers have a tendency to increase marital satisfaction. However, as stated before, *conflict-related support* has a *negative* effect ($c = -0.570$) on marital satisfaction, probably due to the emotionalization of conflict in this type of support.

Similarly, there is also some empirical evidence for hypothesis 3. With the exception of *conflict related support*, there is an increase in the buffer effects when comparing the coefficients of conflict level 2 with those of conflict level 3. For *general support from friends* and *home visiting* the regression coefficients grow from insignificance, i.e. an implicit 0.000, to significant values 1.514 and 1.502. Similarly, for the coefficients of *wife's contacts with peers* an increase from 0.516 to 2.444 can be observed, which is significant with an error probability of $p = 5.7\%$.[9]

Due to the standardization of the explanatory buffer variables, the regression coefficients of Table 1 also provide information about the *effectiveness* of different types of conflict buffers. If we focus the analyses on the highest level of conflict, i.e. the value 3, for which the differences between the buffer variables are most clearly visible, *wife's contacts with peers* seems to be the conflict buffer with the greatest effectiveness: its regression coefficient ($c = 2.444$) appears to be higher than the corresponding parameter values for *general support from friends* ($c = 1.514$) and *home visiting* ($c = 1.502$). However, after checking the corresponding standard errors in Table 1, it turns out that the differences between the coefficients of the three variables have z-values smaller than 0.64 and are consequently *not significant*.[10] This result is striking, as *professional* treatment within a home visiting program does not have superior results than everyday support from friends and peers. Moreover, if one also analyzes the coefficients of the next lower level of conflict (value = 2), *wife's contacts with peers* have even stronger buffering effects than *home visiting* which is *insignificant*. A possible explanation for this finding is

perhaps the relative *internal homogeneity* of female peer groups, which enhances *identification* with other group members and thus furthers *solidarity* in stressful situations. Besides, the homogeneity of a peer group also facilitates the internal *transfer of successful solutions* of conflict-related problems and thus increases the resources for mastering conflict-related stress.

CONCLUSIONS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE

As with any other social problem, there are *primary*, *secondary*, and *tertiary* prevention strategies to counter the deterioration in the quality of life as a result of marital conflicts. Whereas *primary* and *secondary* prevention are targeted at the avoidance or the resolution of conflicts, *tertiary* prevention aims at a reduction of the harmful impact of conflicts on the quality of life of families. Since primary and secondary prevention of conflicts are often too costly or simply not feasible, i.e. due to antagonistic value conflicts, this paper has focused on *tertiary prevention by social support*. According to our theoretical considerations, this variable should have stress releasing and conflict buffering effects.

Our empirical analyses confirmed these effects for three out of the four potential conflict buffers tested in this paper. However, in general this holds only for relatively high levels of conflict. According to the mentioned empirical analyses, the *least successful* buffer is *conflict-related support*, which decreases the quality of life instead of increasing it. At the other end, the *most successful* conflict buffer is *wife's contacts with peers*. Since *general support from friends* is also an important conflict buffer, which similarly presupposes the existence of an informal community network, it seems to be worthwhile to promote such networks through community development (Gottlieb, 1985; Lentjes and Jonker, 1985) and to improve this way the quality of life of couples.

NOTES

[1] The author of this paper prefers the notion *conflict buffer* to the more common term *stress buffer* (Barrera, 1988; Aldwin, 2000: 139ff) as the

discussed buffering mechanisms moderate the negative impact of *conflicts* and not of the resulting stress.

[2] Interview question: "In general, how satisfied are you with your marriage/partnership?": "rather satisfied" (79.8%), "sometimes satisfied – sometimes dissatisfied" (17.6%), "rather dissatisfied" (2.7%) (in parenthesis: frequency distribution of answers).

[3] Interview question: "In many families spouses have more or less dissent, quarrel, and dispute. How often do you have such conflicts?": "never" (2.4%), "rarely" (34.3%), "sometimes" (53.5%), "often" (9.8%) (in parenthesis: frequency distribution of answers).

[4] Interview question: "Do you get support from your good female friends if you have a conflict with your husband/partner?": "never" (26.5%), "rarely" (19.5%), "sometimes" (22.2%), "often" (31.9%) (in parenthesis: frequency distribution of answers).

[5] Interview question: "How often did you get help from your good friends or relatives in the last 6 months?": "daily" (8.0%), "1–2 × per week" (30.2%), "1–2 × per month" (32.9%), "less frequently" (28.9%) (in parenthesis: frequency distribution of answers).

[6] Interview question: "How often do you meet *female* friends and colleagues without being accompanied by your husband/partner?": "daily" (10.6%), "1–2 × per week" (52.4%), "1–2 × per month" (23.9%), "less frequently" (11.2%), "never" (1.9%) (in parenthesis: frequency distribution of answers).

[7] Due to unit and item missing values in the interviews, the total number of statistically analyzed cases (368) is smaller than the total number of families in the treatment and control group (427).

[8] Difference between 3.316 and 1.212: $z = (3.316-1.212)/(0.988^2 + 0.374^2)^{0.5} = 1.99 \rightarrow p = 2.3\%$ (Kanji, 1993: 23 and Table 1).
Difference between 1.212 and −3.815: $z = (1.212-(-3.815))/(0.374^2 + 1.480^2)^{0.5} = 3.29 \rightarrow p = 0.05\%$ (Kanji, 1993: 23 and Table 1).

[9] Difference between 2.444 and 0.516: $z = (2.444-0.516)/(1.163^2 + 0.362^2)^{0.5} = 1.58 \rightarrow p = 5.7\%$ (Kanji, 1993: 23 and Table 1).

[10] Difference between 1.514 and 2.444: $z = (2.444-1.514)/(1.163^2 + 0.959^2)^{0.5} = 0.62$; Difference between 1.514 and 1.502: $z = (1.514-1.502)/(0.959^2 + 0.920^2)^{0.5} = 0.01$; Difference between 2.444 and 1.502: $z = (2.444-1.502)/(1.163^2 + 0.920^2)^{0.5} = 0.64$ (Kanji, 1993: 23 and Table 1).

REFERENCES

Agresti, A.: 1990, Categorical Data Analysis (John Wiley & Sons, New York).

Aldrich, J.H. and F.D. Nelson: 1992, Linear Probability, Logit, and Probit Models (Sage Publications, Newbury Park).

Aldwin, C.M.: 2000, Stress, Coping, and Development: An Integrative Perspective (Guildford Press, New York).

Barrera, M.: 1988, 'Models of social support and life stress: Beyond the buffering hypothesis', in L.H. Cohen (ed.), Life Events and Psychological Functioning (Sage Publications, Newbury Park), pp. 211–236.
Bloom, M.: 1996, Primary Prevention Practices (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks).
Cohen, S. and Th.A. Wills: 1985, 'Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis', Psychological Bulletin 98, pp. 310 ff.
Coyne, J.C. et al.: 1988, 'The other side of support: Emotional overinvolvement and miscarried helping', in B.H. Gottlieb (ed.), Marshaling Social Support: Formats, Processes, and Effects (Sage Publications, Newbury Park), pp. 305–330.
Ellis, D. and N. Stuckless: 1996, Mediating and Negotiating Marital Conflicts (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks).
Gelles, R.J. and C.P. Cornell: 1983, International Perspectives on Family Violence (Lexington Books, Lexington).
Gelles, R.J.: 1997, Intimate Violence in Families (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks).
Gillioz, L., J. De Puy and V. Ducret: 1997, Domination et violence envers la femme dans le couple (Domination and violence against women in couples) (Editions Payot, Lausanne).
Godenzi, A. and G.P. Mueller, (eds), 2001, Bedingungen gewaltlosen Handelns im sozialen Nahraum ((Conditions of non-violent behavior in intimate relations. Final report for the Swiss National Science Foundation), (Boston and Fribourg)).
Gottlieb, B.H.: 1985, 'Combining lay and professional resources to promote human welfare: Prospects and tensions', in J.A Yoder (ed.), Support Networks in a Caring Community: Research and Policy, Fact and Fiction (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht), pp. 59–77.
Gottlieb, B.H., (eds), 1988, Marshaling Social Support: Formats, Processes, and Effects (Sage Publications, Newbury Park).
Healthy Families America: 1995, Critical Elements for Effective Home Visitor Services (National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, Chicago).
Kanji, G.K.: 1993, 100 Statistical Tests (Sage Publications, London).
Lazarus, R.S. and S. Folkman: 1992, Stress, Appraisal, and Coping (Springer Publishing Company, New York).
Lentjes, S. and J.M.L. Jonker: 1985, 'Social support network: A literature study', in J.A. Yoder (ed.), Support Networks in a Caring Community: Research and Policy, Fact and Fiction (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht), pp. 5–38.
Lin, N. and J. Westcott: 1991, 'Marital engagement/disengagement, social networks, and mental health', in J. Eckenrode (ed.), The Social Context of Coping (Plenum Press, New York), pp. 213–237.
Mueller, G.P.: 2005, 'Gewaltloses Handeln in der Familie: Empirische Befunde zu einem Home Visiting Experiment in der Stadt Zuerich' (Non-violent behavior in families: empirical findings about a home visiting project in the

city of Zurich), in J. Kuechenhoff et al. (ed.), Gewalt: Ursachen, Formen, Praevention (Psychosozialverlag, Giessen), pp. 225–244.
Straus, M.A. and R.J. Gelles (eds), 1999, Physical Violence in American Families (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick).
Thompson, R.A.: 1995, Preventing Child Maltreatment Through Social Support (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks).

Address for correspondence
GEORG P. MUELLER
Department of Social Sciences
University of Fribourg
Bd de Perolles 90
CH-1700 Fribourg
Switzerland

E-mail: Georg.Mueller@Unifr.ch